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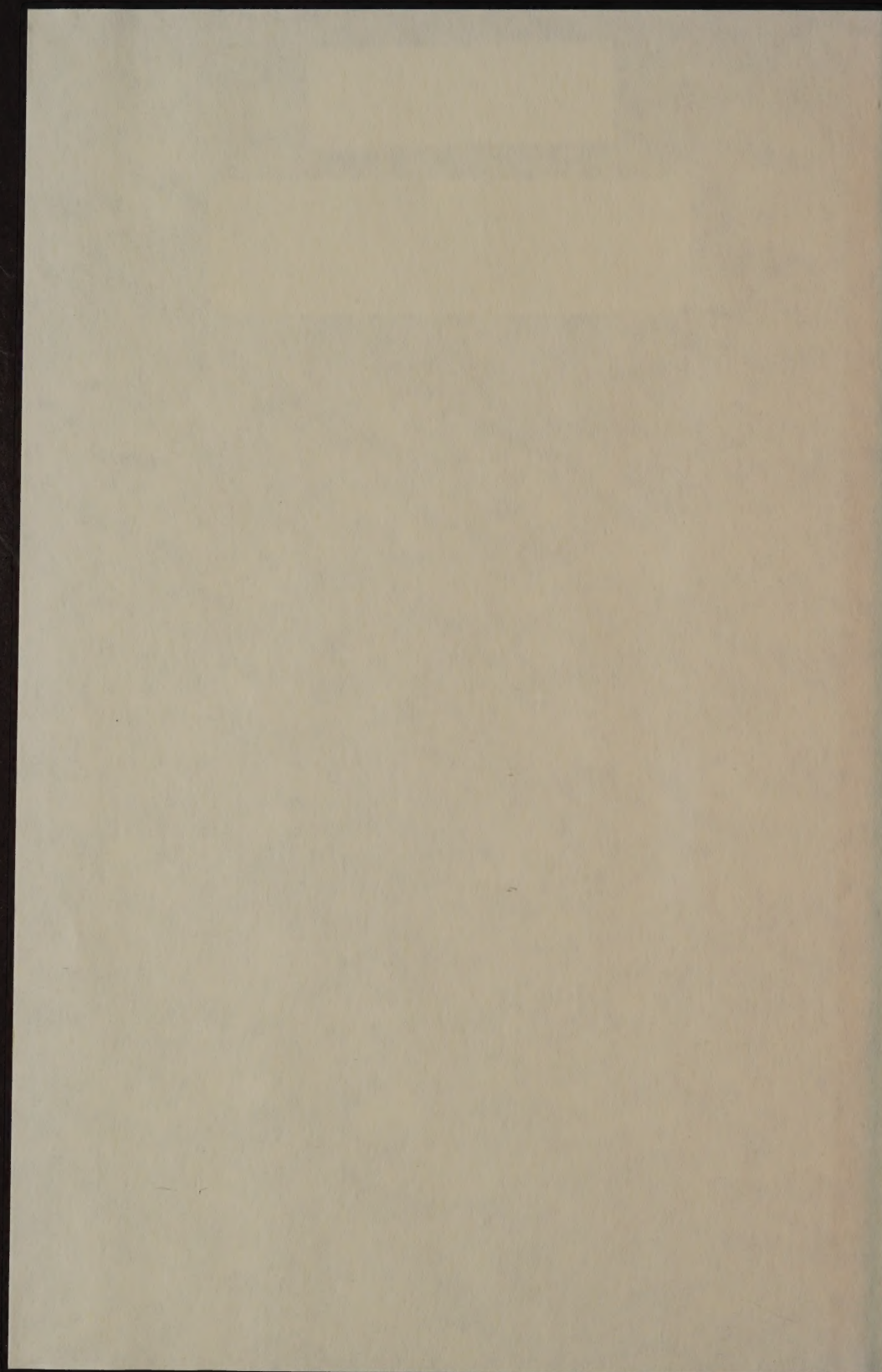
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The story of Preston





*Preston
Town
History*



By Mrs. Ethel Kalicicki
Preston Historian

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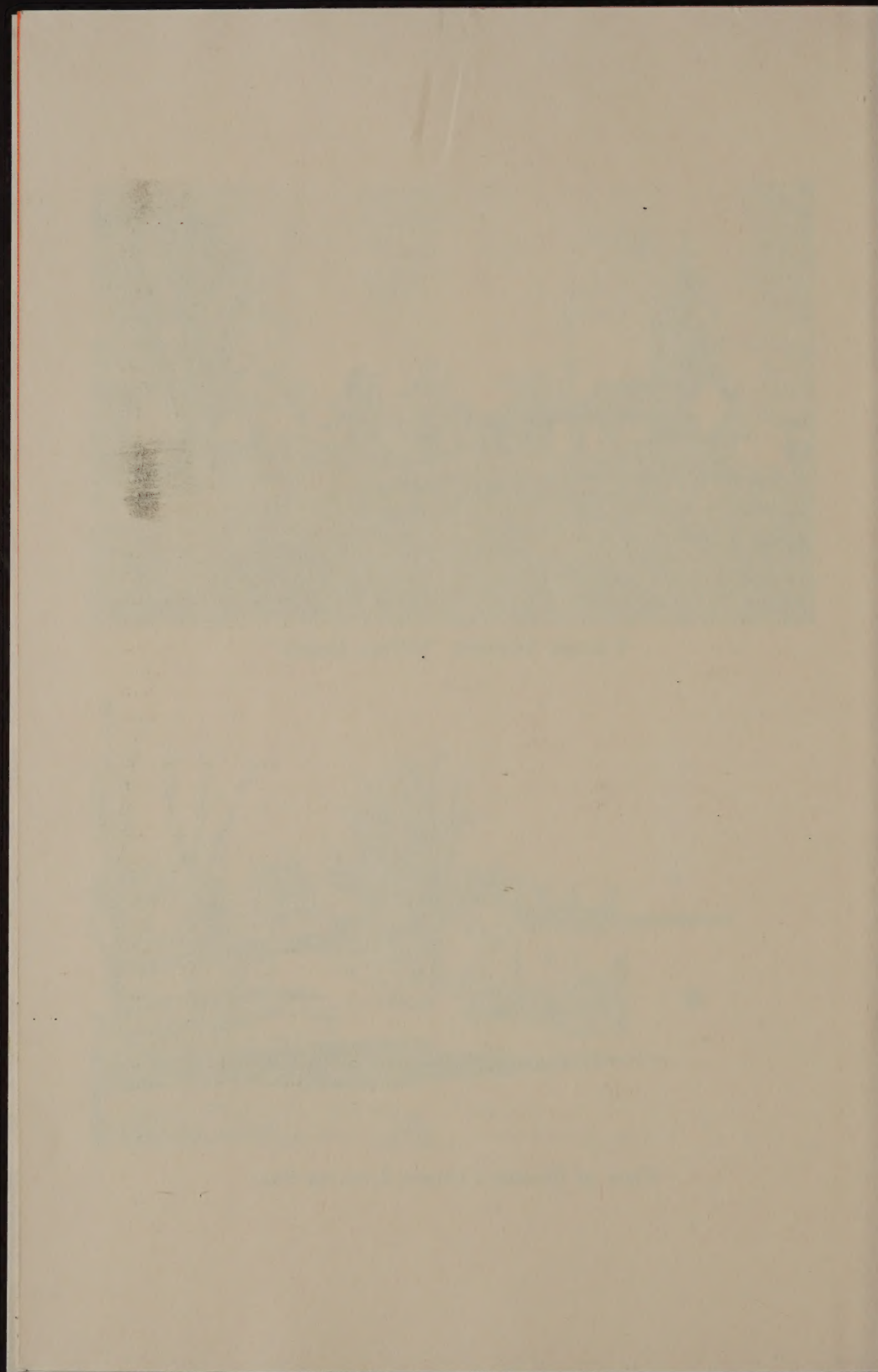
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Preston Corners "Village Green"



View of Preston Corners Looking East



THE STORY OF PRESTON

by Mrs. Ethel Kalicicki

Preston is the Fourteenth Township in Chenango County and lies about the geographical center of the county. It consists of rather high, almost mountainous ridges running north and south. One surveyor in recent years described them as being high enough to be called foot-hills of the Catskills. Between these hills flow fast moving streams fed by springs. All creeks and streams run south and finally flow into the Chenango River. The principle ones are Turner Creek, Fly Meadow Brook and Mill Brook.

The soil of Preston is principally red clay. Rocks crop out at various places and in early times in various parts of the town stones were quarried, building stones, flag stones, and grindstones. Evidences of some of these may be noted today.

Farming is the main industry at the present time. Many of the residents work in industrial plants in nearby towns. The industries that made Preston a busy town in the old days have long gone out of existence as the need for their products has ceased. Large industries and modern transportation has forced them to make way to progress and the land has been the chief source of income for some time. Some traces of these old industries remain in the form of old cellars, ruins, stone foundations, and a few old buildings used for some other purposes, still there for the historian to ponder over and build pictures in his imagination of the days gone by.

My interest in the history of Preston dates from the day, more than twenty years ago when my son, then a lad, on a rainy day, climbed to the wood-shed attic to "poke around" He came down with a card-board box of letters and papers, yellow with age, some dating back to 1804. They were written on rag paper with black ink, probably made of log-wood, which withstood the wear of time. These papers concerned the original settlers of our farm.

We had lived on this place five years, and all that we knew about it was that it was known as the Lewis place. My husband contacted the late Judge Hubert Stratton, who had the legal handling of the Lewis estate (his wife had been a Lewis), concerning these papers. He sat down and told a most amazing story of the early settling of the place. The facts, he related are borne out by written county history. The details not in histories read like a novel.

It was in the year 1787. Afton and Jericho (Bainbridge) each had at least one log cabin of settlers on the Susquehanna River. The rest was Indian country and had not as yet been bought by the State of New York from the Indians. So no one could claim the land as his own. The Unadilla River was the dividing line, of State-owned land and wilderness. Anyone settling this side was called a "squatter."

In this year James A. Glover and his brother, whose given

name is not known, boys aged seventeen and nineteen years old, came alone from Norwich, Connecticut, carrying with them a few cooking utensils, an ax, and a very little money, just a few coins. Probably they also had a gun, although this was not mentioned. No one would think of going without a gun. Also they possessed a knife.

They made their way to what is now Preston, up the Valley of Fly Meadow Creek, and camped beside a large spring. This spring is the one beside the road on the farm of Albion Barter. They spent the night there, then went to locate a likely place for a cabin. They found it farther west on a knoll overlooking Fly Meadow Creek. The Judge indentified the exact spot.

We had noted that spot on our farm because of the un-used well and wondered who had lived there. In the spring of the year before the grass grew one could follow a depression from the spring, a sort of path, to a spot on the knoll where were some large stones, like door-steps. A little farther along were more stones, almost entirely covered with accumulated soil of time. These were in the shape of a square. These were the log cabin foundation and the stones beneath the old ox barn. With primeval forest all around and the roar of the rushing Fly Meadow Brook in the spring it must have been a peaceful spot, for it is that today.

The Glover boys were not idle. After their cabin was built they trapped animals for fur as well as hunting their meat. When late winter came and they had a supply of furs all cured and pre-

pared for market they made themselves a sled from the trees of the forest around them, and together pulled the sled with its load all the way to Albany which was their nearest market. With the money received they bought supplies for the coming year, and must have saved a little also.

These boys began to trade. They must have traded with the Indians, because who else was there? Perhaps they brought back things from Albany that the savages would trade for furs. It is a known fact that they set up a store in their log cabin. We are told by historians that they had the first store in the town.

Later they rigged a grist mill, and some say a saw-mill. Little is known about this enterprise.

One spring they bought a yoke of oxen in Albany with money they had saved. The ox barn was ready. How proud they must have been and how hard they must have worked and saved and done without things to buy these. One lad drove the oxen home, stopping along the way to work the oxen for settlers, no doubt to replace the money used up, and to buy supplies. Their purchases could have left them in a bad way for the next winter. Perhaps food stuffs were the pay instead of money. We can only guess.

The other boy came on afoot, alone. He set himself to cut hay to feed the oxen during the long winter. And he cut it with the only tool he had, a jack-knife! Imagine the labor! He gathered it and stored it in the log barn.

Now in 1788 Governor Clinton bought another tract of land from the Indians. It was to the west of the Unadilla River this time and

included the land of the now town of Preston, along with much more. So this land became legally subject to sale and land titles and ownership. And—the Glover boys by this act became illegal inhabitants of the land they had put so much labor upon. We wonder if they knew it or if they went on blissfully thinking they were still owners.

Samuel Lewis of Voluntown, Rhode Island, was born in 1744. He grew up and married and had a family of children. He served in the Revolutionary War as a private in Benjamin West's Company in Colonel Topham's Regiment, Reg. 1. At the close of the war he migrated west and bought, or took in pay, or part pay, for his army duty, 640 acres in the town of Preston, on Lot No. 75, exactly where the Glover boys lived.

Note: It has been stated locally that the spot Sam Lewis located on was on the next farm, that of Albion Barter. Records of deeds state otherwise. The reason for the misunderstanding is this: Sam Lewis had a son Sam, and a grandson Sam. The grandson settled on the corner, the rose bushes and the stone foundation of his house are still there. The original settler Sam, died in 1818. The one supposed by some to be the original settler was the grandson. Genealogy of the family bears this out in dates. Also deed descriptions.

We can only imagine the feelings of the Glover's and the Lewis's when they met. Probably a peaceful solution was reached. The boys left the place to Sam Lewis and his family. James Glover is supposed to have gone to Montezuma and died there. Now Montezuma was a swampy

place, full of sickness, and many died there in the building of the Erie Canal. Perhaps he was one of them.

However, a James Glover settled in Oxford, married a daughter of Benjamin Hovey who owned a great deal of land in that region. In my own mind I have wondered if it was not the "other brother" that went to Montezuma and died. There is no way of finding that out.

Samuel Lewis's son Sam came on soon in a covered wagon from Rhode Island. He was married and had a family of children. Together the families set up a grist-mill and a saw-mill. They were mill people from away back. Among the old receipts in my possession is one dated August 7th, 1811. It reads:

Received of Samuel Lewis thirty dollars in full payment for one wryfly (not sure of the spelling of that word) water wheel on the model of Benjamin Taler's water wheel, said wheel to be used for the grinding of grain on the privilege of said Lewis, now improved in the town of Preston, Chenango county, State of New York. Signed by Benjamin Nunn and John Tyler.

The Lewises built the first frame house in the town. They had come in by the year 1790. In 1794 the house was built and the first child born in the town was born there. Twenty-four years ago when we moved here that frame house was still standing below our house and across the old road from the log cabin site. It was a simple square house with no trimmings and was going down slowly and was too far gone to be safe to enter. It had two stories.

the upper one reached by a very narrow, steep, pair of stairs. Some years later a hard wind-storm wrecked it. The chimney remained for quite a while longer, then it, too, fell. June roses still bloom around the old cellar. The lilac bush died for want of companionship, the damask roses and narcissus were moved to the big house. A bunch of old fashioned heliotrope still scents the air from a pile of rocks near. Nature is not easily erased.

Years later, Sam's grand-son built the present big house. Logs were sawed, enough for four houses and seasoned for four years. Only the best was used. This was built east of the old house, sometime in the late 1840's. The foundation is four feet thick at the bottom, tapering to thinner at the top. The cellar was quite high. Timbers were extra size, floor joists larger and closer together than most houses, doors large and thick, walls were of plank. One old resident told us that his father told him about the building of this house. It was the show place of the community at the time. Many visited it as it was being erected. And the house still stands, a monument to its builders, rugged, almost unmarked by time, its timbers strong, after more than a hundred years.

At one time the Lewis's went in to the cheese business and had a cheese factory on the corner of the Georgetown Road. That was all their property then, a part of the 640 acres. Sam and his brother Dan got on well, so the story goes, until Dan married. The women folks could not agree, so Sam stayed by the creek and Dan moved up by the cheese factory.

Sam, (the grandson) also lived up by the spring. They operated the cheese factory together. An old map places Sam on the corner at that time.

Water was abundant from the large spring where the Glover boys made their first camp. Stones from the foundation of the cheese factory are still there.

The Lewises prospered. Sam loaned money to settlers going west and became well-to-do. They just naturally prospered at any undertaking. Members of the family set up other saw-mills, one on Fly Meadow Creek just west of Preston Corners which later became Power's mill. It was built by Aaron Lewis, later sold to John Slater in 1844. He made wagon hubs and cheese boxes. In 1847 Wesley Powers bought it and ran a planing machine. His son took over after his death and ran it until 1876 when it burned. Another mill was rebuilt but only lumbering was carried on after that. The ruins of that building are still there, down the old road.

A Lewis built the grist-mill which in later years was run by George B. Fletcher in the village of Oxford on the Chenango river, also a mill at Mill Brook, south of Oxford, and another at East McDonough. There was also one on Judson Creek in the south part of town.

There were many descendants of this family, nearly every town around having people of that name today. One peculiar trait of the family was their habit of willing property, not necessarily to the next of kin or to their own children, but to the relative who was the most capable of handling property and most likely to add

to the family fortunes. This resulted, over the years, in an accumulation of considerable means. The last of the family to hold the original property were three sisters. The last one of those died when ninety-nine years old. The 640 acres had been sold off piecemeal except 225 acres. This we bought after the last sister died. The deed was the first one ever given since the original grant, and lawyers spent much time tracing the title back so a deed could be issued.

After the Lewises, came many others to the town of Preston. Among the earliest ones were:

David Fairchild at Preston Corners. He and his sons were trappers and hunters. They later moved farther west.

Randall Billings came in 1796, settled at Preston Center on the Harold Johnson farm, for many years known as the Coville place.

Silas Champlain settled on the creek one and a half miles southwest of the Corners. (I believe it to be the Paul Barrows place.)

A widow Crandall and her children came in 1798. She remarried to Captain Lyon from whom Lyon Brook got its name. Two of her sons died off fever.

David Eccleston came from Connecticut in 1797 and settled at the Center. (Preston Center is located at the top of the hill two miles south of the Corners, where Timothy Downey resides at the crossroads. It is supposed to be the geographic center of the town and the county). He settled on a 100 acre farm just south of the Johnson farm. One of their children married and settled a half mile farther south on a farm known as the Ashcraft farm.

In 1799 Jonas Marsh settled on the Dudley Brown farm, which from study of an old map is now the home of Dudley Crumb on the cross-road. He, Jonas Marsh, opened the first inn in town. Credit for the first inn goes to several people it seems.

In 1800 Gurdon and Dudley Hewitt also settled at the Center.

Captain Stephen Brown from Massachusetts located west of the Center, on what was later to become known as Roger Street in, or near, the farm of Mrs. Oralls.

Simon Turner came from Stonington, Connecticut and settled on Turner road or Turner Street as it is called today.

John Waite located at the Corners, also.

William Clarke, a Revolutionary soldier, first lived on 25 acres just north of the present County Home then later moved to a spot west of the Corners. I believe it was on or near the Nicholson farm.

William Wadsworth came in 1802 and settled just north of the Center.

Judge John Noyes of Stonington Connecticut bought of Gurdon Hewitt a farm of 170 acres on the site of the County Home. He joined Meade's Regiment in the War of 1812. At its close he set up a mercantile business in Norwich. He was elected State Assemblyman in 1810 and again in 1814, and was State Senator from 1817 to 1820. He was Judge of the Court of Common Pleas until his death. He and Nathan Noyes surveyed many of the roads of the town of Preston as they were laid out in 1807 and 1808. A daughter of his married Dr. Mason of this town. A cousin of his, Gashan Noyes, settled two miles south of

the center. They came through from Connecticut with their three children in an ox cart drawn by three year old oxen, wood-shod.

William Packer came from Vermont and built a home on 300 acres one and a half miles south-east of the Corners.

Elder Davis Rogers and his son-in-law, Joseph Truman, came from Connecticut about 1804 and settled on Roger Street. Truman settled at Truman's Corners in the southwest corner of the town. (No doubt this is the corners now called Norton's Corners).

Ethan Rogers, Davis' half-brother, also settled on Roger Street. The Rogers and Trumans were Seventh Day Baptists and built a church of that denomination on Roger Street. More about that later.

William Kelsey came from New Hampshire and located west of the Corners.

Other settlers were: Rev. Hazard on the Plymouth Road north from the Corners, Abraham Avery and Micah Gross on the Norwich road, Phineas Wells on the Redden farm (Rice's), Captain John Harver a mile and a half south-west of the Corners, Major James McCall and Wade and Clark Hough on the Georgetown road and Ephriam Wells on the Mike Scanlon farm (Dr. George Manley farm) on the road east of the Center. Angell Stead, Captain John Slater, Major Gideon Wetfore (on the "Breed place" south of the Center) and many others.

These early settlers married and inter-married and their descendants spread out until the country side became filled. They bought and sold produce with one another, traded goods and built up business.

There came to be three centers of population. The largest was Preston Corners, at first called Mason's Corners after Dr. Mason. Another one was at Preston Center, much smaller. A third was at Georgetown, a little group of homes situated where Fly Meadow Brook crosses the Georgetown Road. At one time there was another road running west from the main road on the south side of the creek bank and round about up the hill, past Sam Lewis's mill pond and connecting with the now abandoned road from McCall pond to the Creek. There were houses along it. A large bank of old fashioned red roses is still in existence in the pasture, marking the site of one of these homes.

Georgetown (not to be confused with the town of Georgetown in Madison county) was at first called "Bogusville" because of a counterfeiter who lived alone near the creek and made bogus money. He was very successful at the business and finally accumulated money enough to retire. He is said to have buried his plates on Navy Island in Oxford. One of the moulds, for making quarters, came into the possession of C. G. Brooks of Mt. Upton. He kept it for some time with a permit from the U. S. Government to hold it as an antique. Some say it is still in existence.

The settlement on the Georgetown road had a saw-mill and a woolen-mill and a grist-mill. Also there was the saw-mill and grist-mill on the Sam Lewis place nearby, and the Lewis cheese factory a mile to the north.

At Preston Center was a school-house and the Congregational Church.

Preston Corners had a district school, a cheese factory which is now Dick Crandall's store (the building burned and was rebuilt), a hotel built by John Noyes who kept it for a while then sold it. This is supposed to be the same building known for many years as the Elmer Franklin store, now owned by his daughter, Marie Pelczar. It has not been used for a hotel for many years. Also there was a blacksmith shop. I believe two of them, a shoe shop, a tannery located just south of the village, a distillery, three churches Baptist, Methodist and Universalist.

There was a saw mill just west of the Corners owned by Wesley Powers, as we have stated before in this article. To the east there was a saw-mill on a dam on the creek just outside the village.

To the south there was a large distillery where whiskey was made from potatoes. It was near the old town barn. Just south of this was Sam Hall's tannery, before mentioned. It was the largest tannery in central New York at the time. It was 50x60 feet and two stories high. Outside in the yard were large vats made of 2 inch planks in which the hides were soaked. Hides were tanned with hemlock bark and huge piles of this were stored on the second floor and in the yard. The bark was ground in a machine run by water power. Another building called the "currier" shop finished the tanning. The larger hides were made into harnesses for horses and the smaller ones into boots and shoes. There was also a large shoe shop which made the leather up into shoes. Three men worked at this in summer and

four in winter.

Now back again to the early days. The first Town Meeting was held April 4, 1807 at the home of William Palmer. According to the first Town Meeting Book still preserved, the following officers were elected: Supervisor John Noyes, Town Clerk Thomas Richmond, Assessors Randall Billings and Simon Wilcox, Collector Frederick Bacon, Overseers of the Poor Dudley Hewitt and Sylvanus Moore, Commissioners of Highway Abijah Barr, Benjamin Ketchum, and Samuel Nichols. Also a Constable and Pound Keeper were elected.

Some very interesting resolutions were passed as followed, taken directly from the Town Book:

Voted that every ram that shall be found out of the owner's enclosure after the first day of September until the eleventh day of the following November shall be forfeited to any person who may take them up.

Voted that sheep shall not run on the Common.

Voted that hogs shall not run on the Common.

Voted that horses shall not run on the Common.

The Common was the green stretch of grass in the middle of the village which was larger at that time than it is now.

A committee was appointed at the meeting to determine the boundaries of the school districts, eight in number. These were soon put into operation and school houses built. A Sealer of Weights and Measures was appointed and a census ordered. It is not known what were the results of the census.

Licenses were granted to the following people to keep taverns: John Noyes, William Palmer, Sylvanus Moore, Benjamin Ketchum, Elias Avery, David Eccleston, Ebenezer Hayward, and Abraham Spear. The license fee was five dollars.

Soon after the first Town Meeting the roads were laid out by the Commissioners of Highways. Many were surveyed by John Noyes and Nathan Noyes. The roads were divided into districts, 28 of them, each having its stated land owners. This was for the purpose of assessing road work. An owner did not pay road tax in money as we do today, but worked a stated number of days on the road, building it or improving those already built, according to his assessed valuation. Some worked with teams or oxen, an allowance being made also for the animals. The writer can remember when this practise was still in existence in the very early 1900's in some place but was discarded soon after for the present system. If a person was unable to work he hired another in his place.

Later on the town people appointed Fence Viewers.

By 1813 the schools were in operation. Many changes in the roads were made as the population increased.

Roger Street was settled thickly with Rogers families and the Trumans, Seventh Day Baptists. They organized a church society in 1816 which was incorporated by 1836 and later a church was built on Roger Street. Elder Davis Rogers came through from Albany with his family with teams, together with his son-in-law Joseph Truman, as mentioned before in

this article. Roger Street was quite thickly populated and there are a number of old cemeteries along this road today bearing the names of these old settlers.

A Baptist Society was formed in 1837 and a church built at the Corners. Elder Jabez Swan, one of the founders, was chosen the first pastor. The church was built on the north side of the Preston-Norwich road. It existed for many years. In 1879 there were 53 members. After a time it dissolved and the buliding was used for other purposes.

A Universalist church was organized in 1843 at the Corners and a building erected a few years later, also on the Preston-Norwich road near the Corners. Rev. Goodrich of Oxford was pastor, supplying both churches. He is supposed to have burned to death some years later in the great Chicago fire.

A Congregational church was organized and a building erected at Preston Center. Attendance became poor and later the building was sold. Before it could be taken down and removed it burned.

The Methodist church is the only one left at this time in the town. It was organized May 1, 1860, just a hundred years ago. This week the parish celebrated its centennial with appropriate meetings for three evenings. The building is located on the north road, near the Corners. The pastor also serves the McDonough church and lives in McDonough.

The first doctor to come to Preston was Dr. Alexander Kelsey who arrived about 1805. He was killed in 1813 by a falling tree as he was on his way to a patient. Dr. William Mason came

from Connecticut in 1809. Preston was his first practise. He retired in 1853. He represented the county in the State Assembly from 1820 to 1822.

Dr. Thomas Dwight studied medicine under Dr. Mason at the Corners. Then graduated from Medical College. He began his practise in 1845 and continued after Dr. Mason retired until his death after fifty years of doctoring. He died after only a few days illness brought on by over work and exposure while attending his patients. I believe his home was the house removed by Fred Blackman at the time he built his new house.

Dr. DeWitt Crumb, a native of Preston, studied under Dr. Dwight and practised from 1871 to 1873 in Preston, then removed to Otse-lic and continued there.

Dr. Mar Case, the daughter of Deacon Elisha and Lucy Packer Mason, spent her early life in Preston. In 1854 she graduated from the first Medical School that was open for women in New York City. Coming to Norwich she enjoyed a successful practise for twenty years. She retired because of ill health brought on by too strenuous work. She was a great believer in Preventative Medicine. She strove to get at the causes of illness and prevent it as well as cure it.

In the past, Preston has had three noted artists, all of which could be called famous.

One was Sylvia McCall, born in 1848, she was a painter of landscapes and floral subjects. She studied under several artists, among them Julia Dillon, at that time considered the finest flower painter in America. Among Miss

McCall's known paintings were "A bit of Chenango River," "An Autumn Scene in Preston," "The Old Mill Dam in Preston." I have never seen any of her paintings and do not know if any are still around. They would be of great interest if located.

The other two artists were brother and sister, Daniel and Mary Louise Wagner. Their father, Daniel Wagner, was the son of Captain Fredrick Wagner who came to this country as a Hessian soldier in the Revolution. His son Fredrick and wife came to Preston in 1806. I do not know where in Preston they lived.

Their son, Daniel, was stricken with a hip disease at the age of seventeen. He was bed-ridden for several years. Necessity to make a living caused him to turn to the drawing of silhouettes, a mechanical means of making miniature portraits. His younger sister, Louise, helped him in this. Their work was successful. Later on they used water colors to make miniature portraits. Opportunities for art instruction were limited in this raw country, but after years of struggle and self-study they went to Albany. A successful career of portrait painting followed and it is supposed they moved on to Washington, D. C. Among their noted subjects were Daniel Webster, Millard Fillmore, Jenny Lind, Martin Van Buren, President Madison, Garrett Smith, Roscoe Conklin, and many others, a long list. Photography was not developed at that time, or at least not to any extent, and there was a demand for the painted portrait. It has been said that the Wagner Portraits were unequalled in America. Incidentally, Mrs. Louise

Shinners, our county historian, is a descendant of this family of Wagners.

In 1862 they went to New York City. There Louise began landscape painting and was very successful in this, too. One large landscape by her was exhibited at the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia. The canvas, together with others became part of the collection in the Guernsey library.

In 1870 they moved to Norwich and spent much time in painting there, and some portraits of distinguished residents of this locality were done by them.

Men from Preston answered the call to the flag, as did they everywhere in the land. John Noyes, later known as Judge Noyes, joined Meade's Regiment in the war of 1812. He came back unharmed.

In the record of enlistments during the Civil War there are eighty-three. That does not mean that all eighty-three enlisted, as some signed on as substitutes and their names are included also, with the names of those for whom they substituted. This was a common practice and the substitute received a sum of money.

Robert Colwell Hall, 16 years old, was killed by gorillas on board a hospital boat in 1864. He was buried in another state, and according to the record this town was not given credit for him, although he lived here and enlisted from this town. Lorenzo Thompson died of small-pox in Rochester, supposedly while in war duty. Other wounded were: Samuel Stafford, Simon Day, John Sayles, George Stanley, Hiram Syndom, Daniel Turner, Charles Daniels, Lewis and Rial Thompson.

The records of service in the

Spanish-American and the two World Wars are not available at this time. Many from the town were in the last war.

One corner boundary of Preston lies at the Chenango River. History cannot be told without including something about the Chenango Canal which ran through the corner of the town. While there is nothing written about its effect on the town it goes without saying that it must have favorably effected business and transportation here as it did all along its length.

It ran from Utica to Binghamton and connected at Utica with the Erie Canal. The surveying began in 1826 but there was so much haggling over its prospective merits that it was not until 1833 that the Legislature approved it. The estimated cost was about a million dollars. Construction began in 1834 and it was finished, a distance of ninety-seven miles, by October 1836. It finally cost \$4,544,107, just about four times the estimate.

It was ninety-seven miles long, forty feet wide at the top and twenty-eight feet wide at the bottom and four feet deep. It had one hundred and sixteen locks in its length.

Before the canal was opened it took from nine to thirteen days to move goods from Albany by wagon at a cost of \$1.25 per hundred-weight. On the canal, time was cut to less than four days and the cost to \$.25 a hundred weight. It tied shipping to the Hudson and Mohawk valleys, and opened up more business. One of the big items of shipment was coal. In 1850 only six tons were carried out; by 1859 56,288 tons were shipped.

Passengers also were carried on the canal. Winters the canal was closed and it had to be cleaned of silt every year to prevent its filling up. Children loved to throw rocks into the water and these caused trouble, also floods knocked down walls in spots which had to be mended. The packet barges were pulled by horses driven along the tow-path. (Traces of the tow-path can be seen yet between Norwich and Oxford). A tow rope was hitched to the barge and a driver walked or ran along with the team. Passengers on deck had to dodge numerous low bridges or get hurt.

Business was good for a time but the tolls never came up to expectations. The cost of operation at a loss was too great a tax burden on the state so it was closed in 1876, just forty years after completion.

Traces of the Chenango Canal still exist between Oxford and Norwich, and other places along its length. Stretches of the ditch are plain as well as the old tow-path. Year by year, however, the canal is being filled to eliminate swampy ground and make way for new buildings. Before long the traces will not be seen.

Railroads followed the canal. No railroads touched Preston. But the Ontario and Western came through Oxford and Norwich, then the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western, bringing better transportation to Preston as well as the railroad towns. The engine whistles could be heard every day in many parts of the town.

Now in 1960, the O. & W. has been discontinued and the tracks torn up. The DL&W has discontinued all passenger service and

only a few freights go up and down the valley. Soon the railroads will follow the canal into oblivion. Shipping is mainly by truck. The roads are full of "box cars" on wheels.

The first Chenango County Welfare Home was built in the southwest corner of McDonough, not far from the place where the towns of Preston, McDonough and Oxford corner. As it was felt this location was too far from the center of things, in 1840 it was moved. The site chosen was in Preston about a mile south of the Corners. This was nearly the center of the county. It is still there, although there was some talk of moving it nearer a railroad at one time. It was built on the farm originally settled by Gurdon Hewitt.

In the early days a separate building housed the insane. And there was also a department known as the "idiot department," as well as a part for the paupers. The insane building was on the south end and a little to the front of the others.

Nothing of moment seems to have happened in regard to the institution until May 8, 1890, at which time occurred a disastrous fire. William Hall was keeper of the insane at that time and E. F. Manwarring keeper of the poor.

In the afternoon of that day an inmate, Deborah Dibble, an inveterate smoker had died of burns. A coal from her pipe ignited her clothing. Before the fire could be put out her clothing had burned and her mattress and the walls of her room were scorched. The burned materials were thrown out of doors and her remains were laid out on a plank across the iron

bedstead.

Another habitual smoker, a Laura Gray, had a great desire for matches but was not allowed to have them. In the mix up over the death of Mrs. Dibble it is thought she got some matches and probably set the big fire that by eleven o'clock that night was found to engulf oen whole wing of the insane asylum.

When Mr. Hall found the fire the wind was fanning it rapidly. He pulled the rope that rang the big bell on the roof used to rouse the neighbors when an inmate escaped.

At the outbreak of the fire Mrs. Eliza Lingee, an inmate of the idiot department seemed to regain her reason for a time. She broke the window leading from her room to the roof, crawled along a board there to the window of the room where Mr. and Mrs. Manwarring were asleep, broke the glass in their window and awakened them with a cry of "Fire" at the top of her voice.

From then on confusion reigned. Men tried to put out the fire with buckets of water, others tried to help the sick and bed-ridden to safety. The insane were locked in their cells. Some were rescued and some were not. They perished in the conflagration.

Thirteen people in all died that night. Many of the insane escaped into the woods to be rounded up during the next few days. Some were found in the town of Plymouth, more in Smithville Flats.

The homeless were housed in the old hotel at the Corners and at the Methodist church. Later the insane were sent to Utica by railroad and the story of getting them peaceably onto the Utica train's

special car is a tale in itself. The keeper and his wife succeeded in this almost alone as the inmates trusted them. The insane were never housed in the County Home again. The paupers were put into the Half Way House which was leased by the Supervisors for two years for that purpose.

Streams of curious people drove from Norwich and the surrounding neighborhoods with teams and saddle horses to see the remains of the fire. The roads were full for several days.

A coroner's inquest absolved the Home officials of any negligence. It was at this time that a move was made to locate the Poor House near a railroad but the move lost and it was rebuilt on the old site. The present women's building was built after this fire.

On Memorial Day 1925 another fire occurred at the Home. This time it was the men's dormitory which was situated above the horse barn. It burned down. After that the present men's building was erected. Frank Quinn was Superintendent at the time.

In the year 1881 the Preston Grange was organized. The first meeting was held in the school house at Preston Corners. There were 24 charter members. The following ocicers were elected: Rowland Blivn Master, Emily B. Brown Secretary. The Grange was Number 450 and was named "Maple Grange." Beginning in 1882 the Grange meetings were held in Roger's store. At some later time the present Grange Hall was purchased. Meetings are still held at intervals in this hall.

A Volunteer Fire Department was organized in the village of

Preston in the year 1958. Fires had plagued the town for some time, and in March of that year two houses burned within a week. Neighbors helped them build again. A public spirited citizen roused public interest and a call went out to form a fire protection group. The response was surprising. From then on it has functioned for the good of the community. A fire house was built, a fire engine and tank truck and other supplies were purchased. The newly formed auxiliary helped immensely to raise money for these things, all bought with no help from tax money. Elmer Johnson was the first president, Daniel Downey the first, and present fire chief.

In 1958 the town built a new town hall and machinery barn just south of the County Home on the west side of the road. It was used in November 1958 as a polling place for the first time. Formerly the large room over the Franklin store was rented for a town hall, later a room at the back of the store was used. Machinery had been housed in Dudley Crumb's barn. Now the town has its own building.

The tide of history flows ever forward, never back. Perhaps a hundred years from now historians will be digging up facts and happenings about us and wondering who lived where in 1960.

Preston is still a busy town, rich in dairy production and many other things. The residents still care for their town just as the old ones did.

The village "Common" is now called "Green" but it is still there.

At Preston Center there is another village "green," also owned by the town and free of taxation. It is said that at one time soldiers drilled there. They could, of course, have been Civil War soldiers, but more likely they were members of the the New York Home Guard Unit. Augustus Slater, Maurice and Clayton Slater's grandfather, belonged to this group.

Another item of interest is noted in the fact that Indians were around here as late as 1870. A letter in possession of a resident with a postmark of that date describes a person on a trip near here seeing a group of thirty Indians, much the worse for whiskey, causing trouble for the other train passengers. There is supposed to be an Indian grave in the Preston Corners cemetery. No one seems to know his name or anything about him.

May 6, 1890 there was a trial of road machines in the town. Before this time roads had been worked by hand and teams and they were in bad condition. We can assume that the first patent road machine was used here about 1891.

Another item tells of the burning of George Smith's blacksmith shop in April (no year given). It was in back of the house owned now by Clyde Franklin. Mr. Smith was Floyd Tefft's grandfather.

Three merchants over the years should receive attention.

Franklin Edwards was the father of Eva Heady who was Mrs. Minette Torrey's mother. Franklin Edwards' grandfather was a Revolutionary soldier who settled in Pitcher, then lived also in German. He fought and was wounded in the battle of Ticonderoga. His son was Thomas Edwards. Franklin married

Lucretia Ashcraft, daughter of Leonard Ashcraft of Preston, a shoemaker. He worked as a farm hand, later buying a farm on the Norwich-Preston road where he carried on a cattle business.

After that he farmed and operated an inn on the spot between Mrs. John Pelczar's and their barn. There is nothing on the spot now. Their land extended in a semi-circle, the other end facing the home of Rex Franklin at the present time and here was located their home, long since gone. Account books show that Franklin Edwards was doing business in the 1830's. Mrs. Edwards kept lengthy diaries about the doings of the hotel, many items of these being read from time to time on the Norwich radio station by Mrs. Louise Shinnors, county historian.

Horace Bigelow Franklin operated a grocery store on the corner where Fred Blackman's house now stands. He was also deputy postmaster at one time. Some of our older people may remember the store before it was taken down as he was there at a later date in history.

The Franklin store that still stands in Preston has been important. Elmer Franklin operated it as a grocery and general store for many years, followed by his daughter. At present she is teaching school. Before Mr. Franklin, the store was operated by Mr. Rogers, Mrs. Elmer Franklin's father, and after his death by her mother, Jennie Rogers. Then it came to the Franklins. The building is an old landmark. For years the old dance hall on the second floor (I believe the building once was used for a hotel) was used as a town hall.

Later the voting booths were moved to a room at the bank, later to a the new town building.

A. D. Barr manufactured gloves and mittens in this town at one time. He was born and educated in Preston, then became a salesman for fifteen years for the Howe Machine Company of Rochester. He finally set up his own manufacturing business in this town, later moving to Norwich to carry on the same business until his death, after which his son took over.

This article belongs at the beginning but was not discovered until the first was printed so it will be added here.

Early Patents: In the year 1792 land in Chenango county was offered for sale in large lots. November 3 of that year, 3 shillings 9 pence an acre for the western part of the town was offered by Melachthom Smith and Marcus Willett. They bought it, 7,149 acres. Leonard Cutting bought the rest. In all there were 26,030 acres. Assuming they paid 3 shillings, 9 pence (46½ cents) an acre, Preston cost \$9,771.25. This was then sold off to private people. Butler Range extended across the entire west side of the town, one lot deep. The writer has not been able as yet to discover anything more about that range.

Military history of the town:

There are 8 Revolutionary soldiers and 1 patriot buried in this town. There are 3 War of 1812, 5 Civil War and 3 World War 1 buried in this town. Others served from here who moved and are buried elsewhere. Preston boys served in all wars except the Spanish American.

The War of the Revolution was

over before this territory was settled, the first settler coming as he did in 1787, the first land owner about 1800 or 1801. Samuel E. Lewis, before mentioned, was the first land owner and bought his land with pay from Revolutionary service. He died in 1818 and is buried in the Sam Lewis cemetery on the Georgetown road, which cemetery was land taken from his original grant of 640 acres. His monument faces the road and is easily recognized. Quite likely it was the first burial in the town. Of course this may be wrong.

David Eccleston and his brother-in-law, Asa Fanning, settled on the farm now occupied by Timothy Downey and son (some maps show his farm across the road but I believe not) at Preston Center. Both were Revolutionary soldiers, and they, with their families, were buried on a small plot on their farm. This plot has since been obliterated. David Eccleston's son, Charles, married Mary Lewis and they settled a half-mile below the homestead, on the farm later known as the Ashcraft farm.

Captain Stephen Brown came from Massachusetts and settled one mile west of the Center on or near the place owned by the Bioski's and earlier known as the McMahon place. There is not much known about him but he was thought to have been a soldier and is buried in the Brown cemetery on Roger street.

Gashan Noyes, cousin of Judge John Noyes, before mentioned in connection with the town history, was a Revolutionary soldier who came in from Connecticut and settled on the farm now owned by Pat King, formerly known as the "Baldy" Downey farm. He brought

his wife and family of three children in an ox-cart with wooden runners, drawn by a yoke of three year old steers, although it was summer time. He lived here fifty years then moved to Wisconsin.

In the Preston Corners cemetery is the grave of Captain John Harvey who served in the Revolution from his native state of New Hampshire. He enlisted at the age of fourteen and distinguished himself for his determination and responsibility while fighting. When not actually engaged in battle he returned home to work the farm, as did many soldiers. When fighting came closer he would again take up his gun and go. He fought at Saratoga, Monmouth, Stony Point, and probably Bunker Hill. He was intimately associated with Washington and was much attached to him. Some years after the war he moved to Preston. He was very patriotic and for many years wore his military coat every Fourth of July. He was quite a politician and was associated with many movements of public interest. He became a Unitarian in belief and was buried in white clothing in a white coffin which he himself prepared. He disposed of all his personal effects before his death.

William Clark, another Revolutionary soldier, settled a little north of the present county home in 1802, later owning 100 acres west of the village, the Nicholson farm. He descended from Puritan stock, his mother's ancestors having come over in the Mayflower. He lost a leg in the storming of Stony Point on the Hudson, fighting under the command of General Putnam. He was one of the first to receive a federal pension. He is buried in the Corners Cemetery.

Near him is buried William Miner, another Revolutionary soldier about which there is little known.

Major Benjamin Ray, another Revolutionary soldier is buried in the Packer-Mason cemetery.

In the same cemetery is the grave of Jane Fiske Hadley who, although a woman, was a patriot of the Revolution, and as such is recognized by the D.A.R., both in Washington, D. C., and her native Lexington, Mass. For the account of her activities we are indebted to the late Helen Reed Tuttle of McDonough, her great-great-grand-daughter.

Mrs. Hadley lived in Lexington, Mass., with her parents and brothers and sisters, her father being an inn keeper. She was taught to read and write, an accomplishment unusual in those days and was very proficient at the spinning wheel and with the needle. She was also a good cook. In 1753 she married Josiah Headley (later spelled Hadley), and became landlady of an inn on the road between Boston and Lexington.

Her husband enlisted on the American side in the Revolution and went off to war leaving her to run the inn. She saw long lines of British "regulars" as they marched to destroy much needed supplies at Concord. She fled in haste, taking her hands from the kneading of bread dough, not daring to stop long enough to wash her hands. She hid in the forest and saw the British move like a "giant red snake" across the land.

Her inn became the center for the American soldiers and there they plotted their strategy, she entertaining them and providing food, probably tending the wounded. Her

oldest son, Josiah, came down with the fever and died.

She stood on Prospect Hill with a spy glass and watched the burning of Charlestown. A messenger rode up and told her to flee for the British were coming. She managed to bury the silver contribution plates belonging to the church, which she kept, before fleeing with her children and old grandfather into the woods, riding in an old ox-cart. When the British left and they returned they found a dead British soldier on the door-step and a dead Yankee by the well. The British had invaded the cellar and drank all the whiskey they could hold and let the rest run on the cellar floor where it stood ankle deep.

Her wealth had all been used up in helping the "Sons of Liberty" and she closed the inn, and, with some money her father-in-law gave her, went to make her home in the forest. Her husband died, whether in battle or later is not recorded. In 1810 she and her son John moved to Preston where she bought what is now the Jason Belden farm.

Her son John was a silversmith. He and his family resided with his mother. He made a set of silver spoons for each of his children. He invented a secret process for hardening steel and, right there on the farm, made "excellent swords" for the soldiers of the War of 1812. The graves of Jane Fisk Hadley and her son and daughter-in-law are in the Packer-Mason cemetery. John Hill, the original Hill to settle in McDonough and his family were friends of the Hadley's. They spent the first winter at the Hadley home, later settling in McDonough.

One more Revolutionary soldier to be mentioned was Eli Widger, a British soldier, credited with lead-

ing British troops to burn the town of New London. He later came from Connecticut and settled on Mill Brook in the western part of the town. The stream was first called "Widger's Brook" in his honor. Disaster followed his family, which was large. Two children committed suicide, one burned to death, and another was insane.

Preston proudly claims four War of 1812 soldiers:

Major James McCall, buried in the Sam Lewis cemetery.

Alfred Clark, son of William Clark, Revolutionary soldier, fought in the battle of Sackett's Harbor. He lived to be 101 years old and is buried beside his father at the Corners.

Judge John Noyes, mentioned earlier in this history fought in the War of 1812. He lived where the county home now stands. He was in Meade's Regiment.

David Chace (on some maps it is spelled Chase) settled on the Dorr Dunckel farm in 1807 when it was a wilderness, coming from Sutton, Mass. He was 1st Lieut. and was dangerously wounded in the battle of Queenstown Heights in Canada. He recovered and lived to be seventy-two years old. He is buried in the tiny Chace cemetery on the Dunckel farm. Dorr Dunckel's mother was a descendant of his.

When the War of the Rebellion broke out many from this town answered the call to arms. A special Town Meeting was held in September 1862 at which time money was raised to pay each volunteer. Money was paid at the rate of \$50 up during the course of the war, up to \$800 as it became harder to raise the necessary quotas. Many paid substitutes. In all

\$26,290.12 was raised in bonds by the town.

Eighty-six soldiers and thirteen seamen appear on the military list, many were substitutes, so less than that number actually went. There were 21 in the 114th Infantry; 5 in the 44th; 2 in the 89th; 8 in the 149th; 3 in the 161st; 1 each in 54th, 43rd, 121st, 75th, and 101st. Cavalry: 8 in 10th Reg; 10 in 8th; 1 in 5th; Artillery Regiments: 2 in 2nd; 1 in 16th; 1 in 8th New York Battery.

Dr. Dewitt Crumb enlisted from Preston before studying for a doctor, serving in Co.G 22nd Reg. N.Y. Vol. Cavalry, first assigned to the Army of the Potomac, later to the Shenandoah Valley. His company was in some of the fiercest battles of the war. He was wounded in the leg, and later in the head, but neither were severe enough to keep him out of service long. The draft of 1863 included 22 men from Preston, as follows: Stephen Eccleston, Nathan Lewis, Noah Wightman, Burton Westover, Devillo Root, Simon Turner, Martin Quinn, Aaron Burr, Tracy Wightman, Joseph Miles, Colonel Nicholson, James Underwood, Ralph Bliven, Joseph Tracy, William Daniels, William Packer, Leander Rogers, William Tew, James J. Noyes, Ralph Widger, Harvey Surdam, Carlos Hall. Exemptions included John Daniels, Rich Osgood, Horace Clark, Perez Packer, A. Ross, Jr., John Franklin, and Emery Lewis.

Wounded were: John Clark Sayles, Jr., George Monroe Stanley, Hiram Snyder, Charles Daniels, Daniel Turner, Lewis Thompson, Paul Clark.

Died either of wounds or disease were: James Nicholson, Robert

Hall, Lorenzo Thompson, William Houghson, William Finch, Charles Robinson, Thomas Crumb. Jonathan Fanning was listed as a prisoner of war. The complete list of veterans is preserved by the towns and contains some more names. Only five veterans of this war are buried in the town cemeteries.

World War I veterans going from Preston were: Dorr Dunckel, Harold Grover, Floyd King, William Mayes, Raymond McEneny, Thomas Porter, Spencer Shirdon, Donald Stukey, Louis Willcox. Other town residents who were in the war but credited to other towns were Berton Smith, John Stratton (both of World War I and II), John Albrecht, Alexander Oralls, and Augustus Armondi. The last three are now deceased. Louis Willcox died overseas.

World War II veterans credited to the town are: Albert Armondi, David Armondi, Stanley Bartle, Richard Button, Seth Bliven, Arlene Bliven, Raymond Cunningham, Mahlon Follett, Clyde Franklin, Harold French, Dean Hartland, Charles Hathaway, Leroy Hunter, Emmett Jeffrey, John Kalicicki, James King, Linn Kenyon, Newton Law, James Langman, Earl LaRock, Carl Lawton, Myron Manwarren, Acil Money, Murton Monroe, Harold Rice, Lawrence Sales, Linn Shirdon, Burt Slater, Lawrence Wakefield, Ernest Whitmore, Stanley Woodruff, Frances Wright, Richard Wright, Nelson Wright, William Wright, Winfred Wright. *Walter F. Fennell*

Town residents who were in service but credited to other towns are: Fred Blackman, Alan Brown, Edgar Blood, Herbert DeGear, Maurice Huckabone, John Stratton, Barton Smith, Lawrence Froelich, John Albrecht (deceased).

Korean War:

Charles Smith. Trained for it but did not get overseas.

These are service men from all branches of the service, the list made to the best of the writer's information. If any reader discovers errors or omissions please notify her and corrections will be made.

In 1866 Preston raised \$20,000 in bonds as its share toward the construction of the Ontario and Western Railroad. It benefited the town by giving it a better outlet for goods. It replaced the out-dated and defunct Chenango Canal. Each town was taxed to help its construction. Many were against this taxation but it was done, nevertheless.

In conclusion the census figures are quoted as follows:

Year	Number
1841	1117
1845	1050
1850	1070
1865	982
1910	649
1920	618
1930	577
1940	672
1950	845
1960	845—106 of these

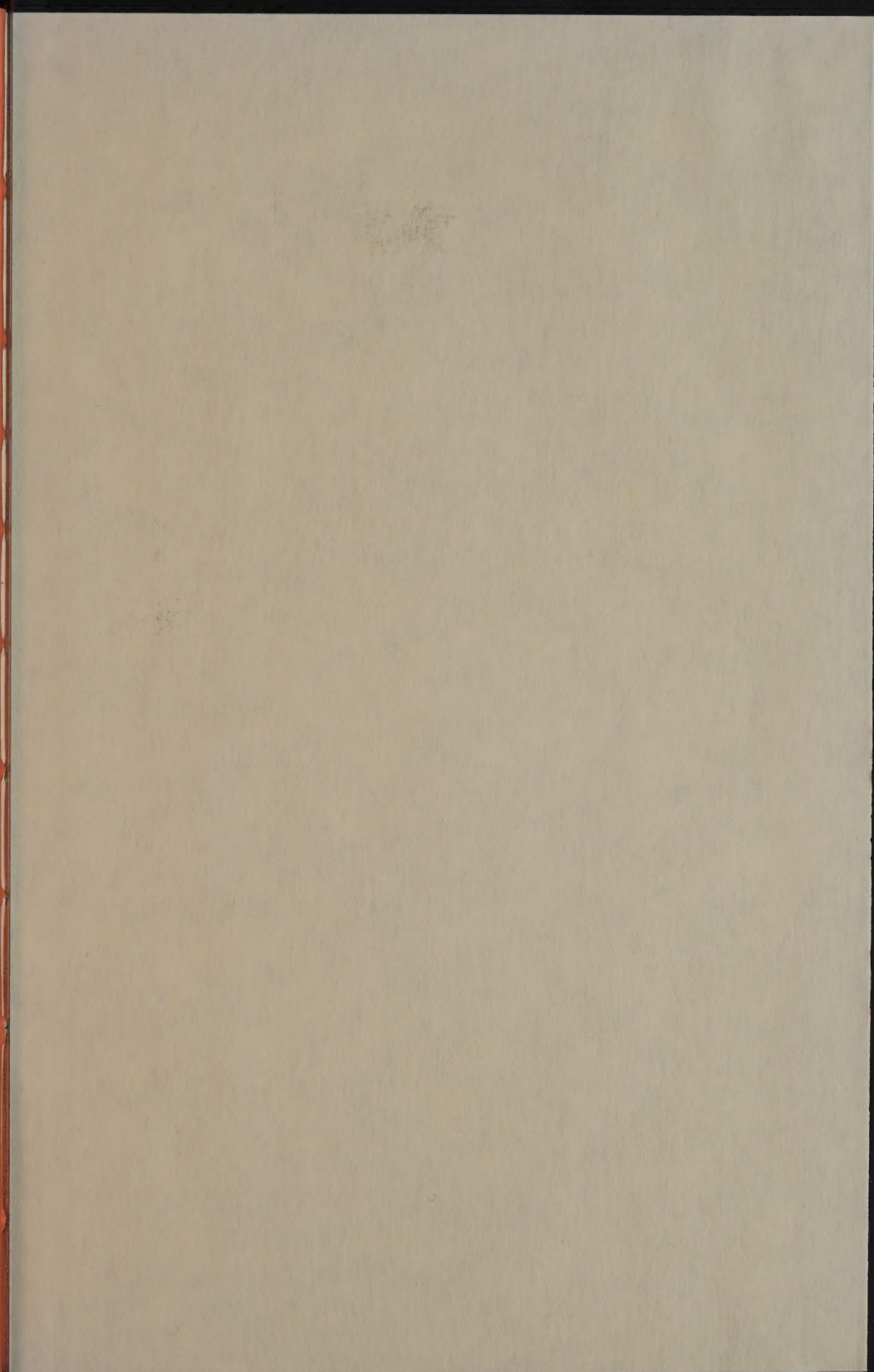
were from the County Home.

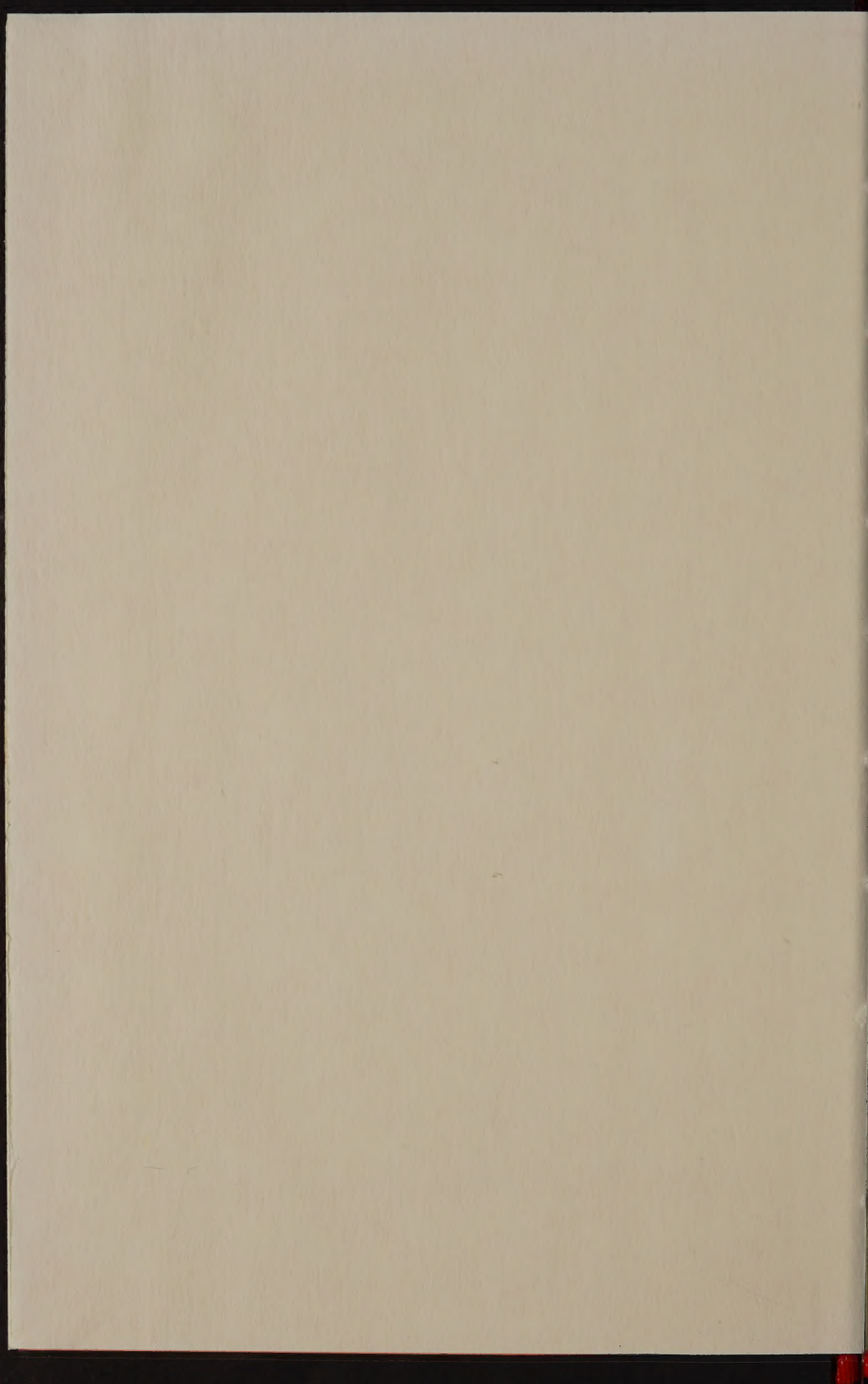
How many of the above included the population of the County Home I do not know.

The Town Historian is deeply indebted to many who have helped work out the history of Preston by the use of scrap-books, maps, and other means. The town records contain much material; the libraries were investigated, etc. The writer wishes to thank all who have helped and solicits any help in the future search for history, however small. Let us all help to preserve our records for posterity.









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